DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 810 PS 031 544

AUTHOR	Stormont, Melissa; Espinosa, Linda; Knipping, Nancy; McCathren, Rebecca
TITLE	Supporting Vulnerable Learners in the Primary Grades: Strategies To Prevent Early School Failure.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	15p.; For individual papers, see PS 031 543 and PS 031 545-548.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v5n2/stormont.html.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
JOURNAL CIT	Early Childhood Research and Practice: An Internet Journal on the Development, Care, and Education of Young Children.; v5 n2 Fall 2003
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Failure; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary School Teachers; *High Risk Students; Influences; Language Acquisition; Primary Education; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Risk Factors

ABSTRACT

This article provides early elementary school teachers with specific strategies to support the diverse needs of children who are vulnerable for failure in school. Children who are vulnerable include those who have an increased risk for failure because of specific characteristics that have been found to predict problems in school, such as poverty. A theoretical framework is provided to illustrate the multiple and interactive influences affecting children who are vulnerable. Specific strategies for establishing relationships, addressing the needs of children who exhibit challenging behavior, and supporting language development are discussed. (Author)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 480 810

Supporting Vulnerable Learners in the Primary Grades: Strategies to Prevent Early School Failure.

Melissa Stormont, Linda Espinosa, Nancy Knipping, and Rebecca McCathren

2003

PS 031544

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Melissa Stormont

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ECRP
Early Childhood Research & Practice

Fall 2003
Volume 5 Number 2

Table of Contents

Supporting Vulnerable Learners in the Primary Grades: Strategies to Prevent Early School Failure

Melissa Stormont, Linda Espinosa,* Nancy Knipping, & Rebecca McCathren
University of Missouri-Columbia

Abstract

This article provides early elementary school teachers with specific strategies to support the diverse needs of children who are vulnerable for failure in school. Children who are vulnerable include those who have an increased risk for failure because of specific characteristics that have been found to predict problems in school, such as poverty. A theoretical framework is provided to illustrate the multiple and interactive influences affecting children who are vulnerable. Specific strategies for establishing relationships, addressing the needs of children who exhibit challenging behavior, and supporting language development are discussed.

Introduction

Young children enter elementary school with many different needs, skill levels, and learning histories (e.g., Kauffman, 2001; Meese, 2001; Mercer & Mercer, 2001). In addition to the challenge of meeting the typical needs of a group of young children who are at different developmental and skill levels, teachers also need to be prepared to work with young children who are at risk for failure in school (Kaiser & Hester, 1997; Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, 1994). A growing population of children are vulnerable for failure in their early years (Erikson & Pianta, 1989; Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, 1994; Walker, 1998; Webster-Stratton, 1997). For the purposes of this article, we have defined children who are vulnerable as those who have an increased risk for academic or social problems given the presence of specific conditions or demographic characteristics that predict future problems. Although the presence of disabilities often creates greater risk for academic and social problems, the focus of this article will be on learners who are at risk but do not have identified developmental delays or disabilities.

Most children are "at risk" at some time or another. James Comer states that "given increasing divorce rates, the growing numbers of single parent families and families in which both parents work, and the general complexity of modern life, even children of well-educated, middle-class parents can come to school unprepared because of the stress their families are undergoing" (as cited in Ascher, 1993, p. 2).

Some of these children will require social or educational intervention and support in order to succeed in school. Accordingly, this article provides teachers with research-based classroom strategies to support learners with a wide range of needs. Prior to the discussion of educational supports, information on the contexts that create vulnerability in learners is presented.

PS 031544

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Children Who Are Vulnerable for Failure

Many children who are considered "vulnerable" live below the poverty level. Poverty has been documented repeatedly as a risk factor; the developmental and achievement deficits in children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are significant by kindergarten entry and increase with each year in school (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). It is also important to underscore the fact that children with certain ethnic or language backgrounds are at greater risk for poverty, including children of African American and Hispanic descent, children whose first language is not English or who speak a nonstandard dialect of English, and children who have limited language skills. Currently, African American and Hispanic students account for 34% of the public school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Multiple risk factors can clearly create greater vulnerability in children. For example, Hispanic children, and particularly those children whose first language is not English, are about twice as likely as non-Hispanic White children to read below average for their grade (Kao & Tienda, 1995). The increased risk for failure for Hispanic students is important to underscore given that Hispanic students account for at least 17% of the public school population, and in some areas of the United States, Hispanic students account for up to 32% of the public school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

In addition to children who are at risk because of poverty and poorly developed or nonstandard English-language skills, children may also be considered vulnerable because of their behavior. Children who enter kindergarten with high levels of activity and aggression appear to be at greatest risk for having negative social outcomes (Stormont, 2002). Peers tend to reject children who exhibit behavior problems, and after a period of time, children who exhibit behavior problems may be on the receiving end of unprovoked aggression from peers (Olson, 1992). Thus, as reputations are created, even in the preschool years, it becomes a challenge to create interventions that change behavior in socially valid ways (i.e., peers and adults acknowledge improvement). As children continue to manifest challenging behavior over time, the task of changing their behavior becomes very difficult. According to Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey (1995), if antisocial behavior patterns are not remedied prior to the fourth grade, the behavior patterns are thought to be so established that they cannot be "cured" but can only be managed with ongoing supports and interventions.

Other research has also clearly underscored the importance of this window of opportunity for affecting children's adjustment. Pianta (1999) states "by the end of third grade, children's pathways are fairly set. By the end of third grade, one can predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy how well children will do in their later years" (p. 16). Thus, the importance of providing supportive early elementary school experiences that build skills and competencies in young children who are vulnerable for having social and academic problems cannot be overstated (Walker, 1998).

Therefore, one of the ongoing challenges for researchers and teacher educators is to provide teachers in early elementary school classrooms (i.e., kindergarten through third grade) with specific strategies to meet successfully the academic and social needs of a diverse group of young children. To better understand the dynamic interaction of layered influences, it is important to provide a theoretical model to use as a framework for understanding vulnerability. We have selected a systems theory to frame the discussion of children who are vulnerable in early educational settings.

Systems Theory

According to Pianta (1999), systems theory is useful for understanding risk factors and the ways in which teachers can buffer or exacerbate children's risk. Systems theory also addresses the complexity of risk factors, the interrelationship among risk factors, and the effects of these conditions on children's development and learning. When applying systems theory to the classroom context, it is important to understand how different system levels can influence classrooms. Pianta (1999) described a multilevel systems theory for understanding children's development and learning within the context of four different

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

system levels. The most distal level includes the culture and community within the specific systems of school, neighborhood, and church. The next two levels include the smaller social groups, which encompass the classroom, peers, and family systems, and the dyadic systems, which encompass teacher, friend, and parent interactions with the child. The final system level is the individual child's biological and behavioral systems. All of these levels are interactive and affect each other in various idiosyncratic ways.

Although most of the specific systems that affect children are addressed in this article in some fashion, the greatest emphasis will be on the classroom, small group, dyadic, and child systems. We chose this focus because of the premise that although the other systems affect the teacher and the student, both directly and indirectly, the teacher may not be able to impact them significantly. However, many systems exist within the classroom that the teacher can impact greatly, including small group interactions, interactions with peers and friends, and, perhaps most importantly, teacher-student interactions. Through positive interactions with children, teachers can teach important competencies that may protect children from developing or sustaining problems (Pianta, 1999). This article is timely given the prevalent societal practice of interpreting vulnerable children's biological systems as the cause of their behavior and ignoring the influence of other systems. "The ease with which biological interpretations are made for children's school-related problems (e.g., reading failure, behavior maladaptation) reflects an unfortunate inclination to attribute the cause of problem outcomes in schools to forces that schools cannot influence or control…" (Pianta, 1999, p. 32).

In this article, we first describe general supports that children need to have within their classrooms. Supports for fostering positive classroom relationships and appropriate behavior are important for all young children, including those who are vulnerable for failure. Within the context of these broader supports, young children who are vulnerable also need teachers who can implement strategies to address behavioral concerns and can foster the development of language abilities.

Supporting Social Development

Classroom Relationships

Classroom relationships can be powerful influences in all children's lives, and as noted earlier, teachers can influence these relationships greatly (Pianta, 1999). Building on Roberts (1996), Pianta argues that this approach can be especially important for children living in high-risk circumstances for whom relationships may be compromised. He further states that

> because adult-child relationships are a resource for development, strengthening these relationships in nonrisk populations can have added benefits to development. In both risk and nonrisk samples, then, a focus on enhancing child-teacher relationships can be expected to elevate competence levels and to help attenuate the rates of failure currently present in public schools. (Pianta, 1999, p. 12)

Dalton and Watson (1997) also note the benefits of supportive classroom relationships. Their research with the Child Development Project in elementary schools indicates that children who perceive that their schools and classrooms have a strong sense of community and that their schools and classrooms are where their teachers and classmates care about them and where their ideas and concerns are considered important are more likely to "like school, trust and respect their teachers, enjoy challenging learning activities, be concerned about and help others, and resolve conflicts fairly and without force" (p. 164). Further, "the relationships between school community and student outcomes—particularly attitudinal and motivational outcomes—hold for schools at a wide range of poverty levels and, in some cases, appear to be strongest among schools with the most disadvantaged student populations" (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995, p. 649).

Dalton and Watson (1997) describe many ways that teachers can foster caring relationships with and among children. Some of these strategies include (1) activities that help children get to know each other and their teacher as individuals (e.g., interviewing each other about favorite activities and special talents,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

bringing special family possessions to school to show the class, making a class book and photo album that feature each child and the teacher along with information about each); (2) class meetings in which children describe "ways we want our class to be" (Developmental Studies Center, 1996) and then collaborate to establish class norms in accordance with those ideas; and (3) collaborative learning environments where it is safe to make mistakes and everyone has a way to participate. One teacher in the Child Development Project explained, "When everyone counts, everyone can contribute; when everyone can contribute, everyone can learn" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 16).

Even after relationships and a sense of community have been built within a classroom, some children may require additional support. Children who are considered vulnerable because of their behavior often have high levels of activity and impulsivity, attention problems, aggressive behavior, or problems regulating their emotions. Many children who exhibit challenging behavior are from families who experience multiple stressors, and these children may not have learned appropriate ways of solving conflicts or expressing their needs (Kauffman, 2001; Stormont, 2001). The following section provides teachers with some concrete strategies for supporting children who exhibit challenging behavior.

Supporting Children Who Exhibit Challenging Behavior

Although all young children benefit from behavior supports such as clear expectations, direct teaching of appropriate behavior, and positive interactions with teachers, children who are vulnerable because of their challenging behavior usually need more support in these areas. In addition, children who are vulnerable may need other more individualized supports. These supports are discussed in the following sections.

Teach Expectations. At the beginning of the school year, elementary school teachers commonly introduce, or develop with their students, the rules or expectations for their classroom (Meese, 2001). Reviewing the rules during the first days or weeks of school will often be enough for children who have had similar behavior expectations stressed in other environments. However, for some children, learning acceptable classroom behavior will take a lot of time and practice (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Children who are vulnerable for challenging behavior will need multiple opportunities to learn the rules and may take longer to learn how to behave appropriately in different settings. It is important that teachers understand the different experiences that some children have had in terms of behavior expectations (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). As Van Acker, Grant, and Henry (1996) note:

> The behaviors and values that children learn at home and in their community are brought with them as they enter school. For many of these children the behaviors that are perceived as inappropriate in the school setting are learned and/or sanctioned in the child's home. (p. 317)

In other cases, children have families who have taught and tried to support appropriate behavior, but because of the children's unique characteristics (e.g., high activity, attention problems), these children need additional support in the school setting.

Without understanding how different contexts affect children's behavior, teachers may develop a negative attitude toward children who exhibit challenging behavior (Kauffman, 2001). As noted above, children at risk for challenging behavior need to be taught explicitly what they are expected to do to meet their needs without jeopardizing the needs of others in the class or school. One way teachers can accomplish this goal is to give concrete and specific feedback to children (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). For example, teachers may point out to a child when he behaved kindly to a peer or adult. Conversely, if a child was not kind, teachers may first explain to her that what she did was not kind in very specific terms and then help her say what she wants to say in an appropriate way. Young children who are vulnerable for behavior problems may not have the language skills necessary to negotiate their needs with peers. When these children hear "use your words," they may think that they are using their words. Teachers need to support children in learning new words and new ways to negotiate their needs and desires. Teaching appropriate social behavior requires at least as much patience as teaching academic concepts (Sugai & Lewis, 1996). If children make an academic error (e.g., child says "ten-teen" instead of "twenty"), teachers use that information to assess what a child understands about specific content. If a child makes a social error (e.g., he calls a child a name when she interrupts his activity), teachers must also use this behavior as a piece of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

information to target the child's needs for instruction in this area (Sugai & Lewis, 1996).

Monitor Interactions. Teachers can easily become frustrated with the amount of time they spend managing the behavior of a few students. They may also find themselves feeling that they are constantly negative or critical with some children who exhibit challenging behavior. For these few children, it is important that teachers monitor the feedback that they are giving to them (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). For example, do children only get teacher attention and assistance when they are off-task or breaking a rule? Furthermore, is that attention negative? Jack and colleagues (1996) found that children who exhibit challenging behavior had four times as many negative interactions with teachers as positive. Teachers need to collect data on how often they are providing positive feedback to the students they find most challenging.

Feedback could be monitored on an index card that the teacher keeps in his or her pocket or desk (i.e., where numbers of negative, corrective, and positive comments are tallied). If teachers find that they are not giving many positive comments to a few students, they could plan specific times to check whether students are acting appropriately and then provide positive feedback to each student (Gunter & Coutinho, 1997; Maag, 2001). The feedback should highlight for students what they are doing that is appropriate and helpful for their overall learning or social relationships. Teachers spend an incredible amount of time managing the behavior of a small number of students (Kauffman, 2001). It is important to use this time to support appropriate behavior proactively rather than spending time reacting to inappropriate behavior and perhaps contributing to a pattern of negative behavior (Gunter & Coutinho, 1997; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Maag, 2001; Kauffman, 2001; Sugai & Lewis, 1996).

Target Individual Needs for Extra Support. When high rates of negative or corrective feedback are given to a few students, teachers should help support those students by providing more individualized supports for appropriate behavior. If a student tends to have problems consistently in certain contexts, then the teacher needs to support the child by restating the expectations for that setting immediately before the student enters it (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Peers can also support other children by sharing game rules and other directions for activities prior to beginning. This support is particularly important for students who are impulsive and have problems creating organizational structures to approach play with peers (Stormont, 2002).

Settings that include large groups of children and minimal adult supervision are often associated with problem behavior in children (Sugai & Lewis, 1996). Additional strategies may need to be implemented in these settings because they may serve as triggers for problem behavior (e.g., playing tetherball, entering and exiting the lunch line, lining up and waiting for the bus [Lewis, Powers, Kelk, & Newcomer, 2002, Meese, 2001; Mercer & Mercer, 2001]).

For some children, visual cues may help them remember or conceptualize behavioral skills that are required in the school setting. Students could help create pictures that illustrate what desired behavior looks like in different settings. Teachers could also take pictures of students in the class when they are exhibiting behaviors with which a few children struggle (e.g., sharing, respecting others' activities, keeping hands to self, talking out problems) and refer to the pictures prior to entering different settings where those behaviors should be present. Students who are vulnerable may need such structure and visual cues to help them be more successful (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). Children's challenging behavior is also related to the how closely the task that they are expected to complete matches their abilities. Gunter and Coutinho (1997) found that when children were provided with instructional modifications or enough information to be successful when completing tasks, their disruptive behavior decreased.

Some students may also need more focused instruction on specific social skills. Young children who are vulnerable may have some common social skills deficits, including, for example, using aggression to resolve conflict. Children who use aggression when they are angry need strategies for regulating their anger in more socially appropriate ways. For example, children can be taught to ask to talk with a particular person when they are upset. Children can also provide teachers with a signal that indicates that they are getting upset and need help coming up with appropriate ways to deal with a conflict. Children become angry for a variety of reasons. Some children may get frustrated when they cannot put together a puzzle or figure out what they are supposed to do to complete an assignment. For children who need more

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

concrete directions or assistance completing tasks, teachers might assign these students a few peer buddies who could help the student when he or she needs assistance. Teachers could educate the peer buddies on how to work with the student, including ways to communicate clearly and how to help the student complete a task without completing it for him or her.

Other children become angry when they are given instructions to do something that they do not want to do. Whether the direction is to be seated or to come in from recess, some children have trouble complying immediately with a teacher's requests (Olympia, Heathfield, Jenson, & Clark, 2002). Teachers need to support these students by providing prompts for transitions and perhaps helping students plan for what they will do when they go to the other setting. For example, a teacher might say, "Sami, we are going in from recess in 5 minutes. Do you know what we are going to do when we get inside?" Sami might say, "You are going to read to us. Can I draw while you are reading?" This conversation and opportunity to honor a child's preference (drawing) may ease the transition from recess. Another way teachers can work with students who do not like to comply with directions is to offer as many choices within tasks as possible. These choices need to be structured. For example, choosing not to complete assigned tasks is unacceptable. However, children could choose how they complete tasks or the order in which they complete them. Again, it is also important that teachers are consistent in enforcing their expectations while supporting children in negotiating how to get their personal needs met without disrupting others. Research clearly supports the need for such support (Eisenberg et al., 1999). Specifically, young children's reactions to anger in early elementary school were predictive of social competence several years later.

Many packaged social skills curricula are available that may be useful for particular groups of students who need to work on strategies for dealing with anger, asking for assistance, and other social behaviors. For example, one social skills curriculum is the Skillstreaming series (Goldstein, McGinnis, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 2003; McGinnis & Goldstein, 2003). This curriculum includes a format that lists specific skills to be addressed and then provides corresponding lesson plans. However, lessons need to be modified and adapted to make the curriculum more meaningful to the students (Sugai & Lewis, 1996). Additionally, social skills should be taught throughout the day and supported by different people in the school environment. Overall, social skills instruction should focus on teaching children to respond to their environment in ways that are socially appropriate so that they develop more positive relationships with peers and adults and spend more time engaged in learning. For an extensive review of how social skills should be assessed and guidelines for social skills instruction, see Sugai and Lewis (1996).

Peers and other adults can be recruited to help support children's use of socially appropriate behavior in different contexts. One specific strategy that may be particularly appealing to teachers because it involves a classroom-wide commitment to supporting appropriate behavior is peer "tootling." Researchers have recently recommended teaching peer tootling to support peer recognition of appropriate behavior and to minimize adult attention for tattling behavior (Skinner, Neddenriep, Robinson, Ervin, & Jones, 2002). When implementing the tootling strategy, students record, on an index card taped to their desk, specific instances when they observe a peer helping another peer throughout the day. The teacher collects index cards at the end of each day, records the data, and shares the information with the students the following morning. Teachers add their own observations, so that, over a few days, all children are recognized for positive peer behavior.

The overall purpose of the strategy is to teach children to recognize when their peers are doing kind things. This experience can be especially poignant for students who are vulnerable and may receive only negative feedback from peers regarding their behavior. Teachers could modify this strategy and have class meetings at the end of the day during which the children share their comments regarding their peers. Again, teachers would add their own observations as necessary to be sure all children are recognized over time. Teachers could also have other adults such as the principal or another teacher come in and share their comments regarding observations of children's appropriate behavior.

Access Additional Support. For 3-5% of the school-age population, the support strategies delineated in article will not be enough to support them in the general education setting (Kauffman, 2001). Therefore, teachers need to collaborate with other professionals who have expertise in the area of challenging behavior. School psychologists and behavior consultants should have the expertise needed to conduct functional behavioral assessments of children who exhibit severe behavior problems. Functional

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

behavioral assessments involve a detailed analysis of the environmental factors that may support a student's inappropriate behavior followed with an individualized plan to teach and support a more socially appropriate alternative behavior (e.g., Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Olympia, Heathfield, Jensen, & Clark, 2002).

For most students who are vulnerable, early supports for behavior can eliminate the need for more intrusive interventions. Early supports for academic difficulties are also important. Many children who exhibit challenging behavior also have skill deficits (Kauffman, 2001). Children who exhibit challenging behavior who have academic skill deficits may become disruptive to avoid difficult tasks. For many students who are vulnerable, some of their academic needs in school can be traced back to weak English-language skills. Accordingly, the following section describes strategies that teachers can use to support language development.

Supporting Language Development

Although most children who enter kindergarten are able to talk, school failure is often associated with language deficits. The negative effects of language delays and disorders on peer relationships (Rice, 1993), emotional and psychiatric disorders (Baker & Cantwell, 1982; 1987; Beitchman, Nair, Clegg, Ferguson, & Patel, 1986), behavior problems (Camarata, Hughes, & Ruhl, 1988), reading ability (Bashir & Scavuzzo, 1992), and later school achievement (Catts, 1993; Fey, Catts, & Larrivee, 1995; Watkins, 1994) have been well documented. As many as 17% of Americans are estimated to have some kind of communicative disorder (Owens, Metz, & Haas, 2000), and many more individuals have difficulties with communication that are not severe enough to be considered a disorder. The purpose of this section is to describe difficulties experienced by students who are vulnerable in the areas of language and some strategies to enhance the development of these children's skills.

Detecting language difficulties in early elementary school when children are able to talk can be challenging. Children struggling with language often have deficits in either auditory processing or in word retrieval. Frequently, teachers are concerned about the child's classroom behavior or low academic achievement and do not suspect that the child is having difficulty with language. Characteristics of children experiencing language difficulties may include difficulty following directions (may appear to be noncompliant), difficulty with phonics and hearing the differences among sounds, difficulty using either contextual or syntactic information for figuring out unknown text, difficulty in becoming or staying organized, difficulty with time management, difficulty with auditory comprehension, and difficulty getting along well with peers.

In general, children who have difficulty processing language need support from the environment to help make sense of the words they hear, particularly oral directions. The first strategy, adding visual or physical cues, can make the words more understandable and help the child remember what was being said. A second strategy is to ask for feedback or check for understanding. Often, children do not know that they do not understand, so asking, "Do you understand?" results in a nod of the head. Instead, teachers should ask the child a question that requires specific information. For example, "Tell me, what are you going to do first?" A third strategy is to avoid giving a list of directions at once. Often, the only direction the child will remember is the one heard last, which is not what teachers want done first. If it is necessary to give a series of directions, teachers can add written directions or pictures of the steps so the child has a concrete prompt.

In addition to those children who may have difficulty processing auditory input, children whose language in the home is not a good match to the language in the classroom may experience difficulty (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 2000). School requires a language style that some families use as part of the familial communication style, and other families do not. Literate style language (i.e., school language) is more decontextualized than the type of language typically used among people who are familiar with each other. Many children need additional support to develop the vocabulary and narrative skills required for school success.

Vocabulary and narrative skills can be strengthened through reading to children and encouraging children

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

to interact with both the teacher and the storybook. Research on the effects of interactive storybook reading with young children has shown that substantial gains can be made in oral language development, particularly for children from low-income environments who demonstrate language delays (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1998; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Karweit & Wasik, 1996; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). Although interactive reading has been effective with kindergartners (Leung & Pikulski, 1990; Morrow, O'Connor, & Smith, 1990), as described below, it is not a common experience for many elementary-age children.

Storybook reading should be an interactive process, involving the child, the teacher, and the text. In addition to reading the text, adults should pose questions, comment on important features of the pictures or story, and respond to children's initiations about the words and pictures in the books (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1998; Cole & Maddox, 1997; Mautte, 1990). This kind of interaction requires a small adult:child ratio and is difficult to do effectively in a large group. Teachers can use the assistance of aides, paraprofessionals, parent volunteers, practicum students, and other professionals to help support storybook reading.

Storybooks as well as home and classroom activities can provide the context for children to construct their own narratives. Finding time in the day for children to tell those stories can be challenging, but doing so is important in developing narrative skills. In addition to the general language supports presented in this section, it is also important to address the needs of children who are vulnerable for failure who are learning English as a second language.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), 18% of all 5- to 17-year-old children live in families where English is not the primary language. In general, school experiences should support the continued development of the child's primary language while providing meaningful experiences with English (International Reading Association, 1997). Many classroom strategies can be used to support the development of the primary language. It is important to remember that the strategies used to support learning a first language are useful for supporting the acquisition of the second or even third language. These strategies include referential language, repetition, providing a rich context for the language, and beginning at the level where the child is able to understand. Children who are in the beginning stages of learning a language may listen for a long time before being willing to talk in class.

The development of both oral language and literacy in English can be supported in early childhood classrooms. Labeling objects and areas in the classroom using English and the other languages represented in the room can help students begin to make the connections between their home language and English. Storybooks can also be used to support language and literacy for children whose primary language is not English. Strategies include (1) adding the primary language translation to familiar stories, (2) sending translated books home, (3) establishing a lending library that includes books written in the children's primary languages, and (4) having fluent speakers of the child's primary language (instructional assistants, parent volunteers, older children) read and engage the child in early literacy activities in the primary language (Espinosa & Burns, in press). English-language development can be facilitated using the language strategies discussed above. It is important to remember that children will not learn literacy skills in a language they do not yet speak.

Summary

Many different factors place children in a vulnerable position upon entry into elementary school. The first purpose of this article was to provide professionals who work in early elementary school settings with information regarding risk factors that create such vulnerability in young learners. Because the interactions among different risk factors are also important to consider for each student, an interactive systems theory was used as a framework to discuss vulnerability. The second purpose of this article was provide professionals with some concrete strategies to support learners who are vulnerable. The foundational strategy is to establish personal relationships with and among students. Additional strategies for supporting children who exhibit challenging behavior and for supporting language development were also delineated.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The importance of teachers being prepared to work with children who are vulnerable cannot be overstated. Success or failure in the first years of school greatly affects children's futures. If children leave third grade without good social skills and foundational language (and then subsequent reading) skills or have developed or sustained challenging behavior, their likelihood of having successful futures is bleak. Teachers need strategies such as the ones provided in this article to help create more successful educational futures in the lives of children who are vulnerable for failure.

Note

*In alphabetical order.

References

Arnold, David S., & Whitehurst, Grover J. (1998). Accelerating language development through picture book reading: A summary of dialogic reading and its effects. In David K. Dickinson (Ed.), *Bridges to literacy: Children, families, and schools* (pp. 103-128). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Ascher, Carol. (1993). *Changing schools for urban students: The School Development Program, Accelerated Schools, and Success for All.* Trends and Issues No. 18. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. ED 355 313.

Baker, Lorian, & Cantwell, Dennis P. (1982). Psychiatric disorder in children with different types of communication disorders. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 15*(2), 113-126.

Baker, Lorian, & Cantwell, Dennis P. (1987). A prospective psychiatric follow-up of children with speech/language disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 26*(4), 546-553.

Bashir, Anthony S., & Scavuzzo, Annebelle. (1992). Children with language disorders: Natural history academic success. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 25*(1), 53-65. EJ 441 364.

Battistich, Victor; Solomon, Daniel; Kim, Dong-il; Watson, Marilyn; & Schaps, Eric. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and students' attitudes, motives, and performance: A multi-level analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 627-658. EJ 512 947.

Beitchman, Joseph H.; Nair, Rama; Clegg, Marjorie; Ferguson, B.; & Patel, P. G. (1986). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children with speech and language disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 25*(4), 528-535.

Camarata, Stephen M.; Hughes, Charles A.; & Ruhl, Kathy L. (1988). Mild/moderate behaviorally disordered students: A population at risk for language disorders. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in the Schools, 19*(2), 191-200. EJ 370 416.

Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children. (1994). *Starting points: Meeting the needs of our youngest children. The report of the Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children.* New York: Carnegie Corporation. ED 369 562.

Catts, Hugh W. (1993). The relationship between speech-language impairments and reading disabilities. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research, 36*(5), 948-958. EJ 472 679.

Cole, Kevin, & Maddox, Mary. (1997). *Talking and books: Language is the key* [A video-based early language program]. Seattle: Washington Research Institute. ED 469 671.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Cook, Ruth E.; Tessier, Annette; & Klein, M. Diane. (2000). *Adapting early childhood curricula for children in inclusive settings* (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

Dalton, Joan, & Watson, Marilyn. (1997). *Among friends: Classrooms where caring and learning prevail*. Oakland, CA: Developmental Studies Center. ED 414 071.

Developmental Studies Center. (1996). *Ways we want our class to be: Class meetings that build commitment to kindness and learning*. Oakland, CA: Author. ED 393 562.

Dickinson, David K., & Smith, Miriam W. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers' book readings on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly, 29*(2), 105-122. EJ 487 825.

Eisenberg, Nancy; Fabes, Richard A.; Murphy, Bridget C.; Shepard, Stephanie; Guthrie, Ivanna K.; Mazsk, Pat; Poulin, Rick; & Jones, Sarah. (1999). Prediction of elementary school children's socially appropriate and problem behavior from anger reactions at age 4-6 years. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 20*(1), 119-142.

Erikson, Joan M., & Pianta, Robert C. (1989). New lunch, old feelings: What kids bring to school. *Early Education and Development, 1*(1), 15-23.

Espinosa, Linda M., & Burns, Susan M. (in press). Early literacy for young children and non-English speakers. In C. L. Howes (Ed.), *Teaching and learning in the classroom for four-eight year old children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Fey, Marc E.; Catts, Hugh W.; & Larrivee, Linda S. (1995). Preparing preschoolers for the academic and social challenges of school. In Marc E. Fey, Jennifer Windsor, & Steven F. Warren (Eds.), *Language intervention: Preschool through the elementary years* (pp. 3-37). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Goldstein, Arnold P.; McGinnis, Ellen; Sprafkin, Robert P.; Gershaw, N. J.; & Klein, Paul. (2003). *Skillstreaming the adolescent: New strategies and perspectives for teaching prosocial skills*. Champaign, IL: Research Press. ED 416 608.

Gunter, Phillip L., & Coutinho, Martha J. (1997). Negative reinforcement in classrooms: What we're beginning to learn. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 20*(3), 249-264. EJ 581 742.

International Reading Association. (1997). *The role of phonics in reading instruction*. [Position statement of IRA]. Newark, DE: Author. ED 437 647.

Jack, Susan L.; Shores, Richard E.; Denny, R. K.; Gunter, Phillip L.; DeBriere, Terry; & DePaepe, Paris. (1996). An analysis of the relationship of teachers' reported use of classroom management strategies on types of classroom interactions. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 6*(1), 67-87.

Kaiser, Ann P., & Hester, Peggy P. (1997). Prevention of conduct disorder through early intervention: A social-communicative perspective. *Behavior Disorders, 22*(3), 117-130. EJ 550 605.

Kao, Grace, & Tienda, Marta. (1995). Optimism and achievement: The educational performance of immigrant youth. *Social Science Quarterly, 76*(1), 1-19. EJ 515 433.

Karweit, Nancy, & Wasik, Barbara A. (1996). The effects of story reading programs on literacy and language development of disadvantaged preschoolers. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 1* (4), 319-348. EJ 538 659.

Kauffman, James M. (2001). *Characteristics of emotional and behavioral disorders of children and youth* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill. ED 406 799.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Leung, Cynthia B., & Pikulski, John J. (1990). Incidental learning of word meanings by kindergarten and first grade children through repeated read aloud events. *Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (Vol. 39, pp. 231-239). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Lewis, Timothy J.; Powers, Lisa J.; Kelk, Michele J., & Newcomer, Lori L. (2002). Reducing problem behaviors on the playground: An investigation of the application of schoolwide positive behavior supports. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(2), 181-190. EJ 642 605.

Lewis, Timothy J., & Sugai, George. (1999). Effective behavior support: A systems approach to proactive schoolwide management. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 31*(6), 1-24. EJ 604 910.

Maag, John W. (2001). Rewarded by punishment: Reflections on the disuse of positive reinforcement in education. *Exceptional Children, 67*(2), 173-186. EJ 621 427.

Mautte, Lois A. (1990). The effects of adult-interactive behaviors within the context of repeated storybook reading upon the language development and selected prereading skills of prekindergarten at-risk students. *Florida Education Research Council Research Bulletin, 22*(3), 1-31. ED 344 186.

McGinnis, Ellen, & Goldstein, Arnold. (2003). *Skillstreaming the elementary school child: New strategies and perspectives for teaching prosocial skills*. Champaign, IL: Research Press. ED 416 609.

Meese, Ruth L. (2001). *Teaching learners with mild disabilities* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Mercer, Cecil D., & Mercer, Ann R. (2001). *Teaching students with learning problems* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Morrow, Lesley M.; O'Connor, E. M.; & Smith, Jeffrey K. (1990). Effects of a story reading program on the literacy development of at-risk kindergarten children. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 22*(3), 255-273.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *Participation in education: Elementary and secondary education—Racial/ethnic distribution of public school students* [Online]. Available: http://www.nces.ed.gov//programs/coe/2002/section1/indicator03.asp [2003, July 8].

Olson, Sheryl L. (1992). Development of conduct problems and peer rejection in preschool children: A social systems analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 20*(3), 327-350.

Olympia, Daniel E.; Heathfield, Lora T.; Jensen, William R.; & Clark, Elaine. (2002). Multifaceted functional behavior assessment for students with externalizing behavior disorders. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(2), 139-155. EJ 642 602.

Owens, Robert E. Jr.; Metz, Dale E.; & Haas, Adelaide. (2000). *Introduction to communication disorders: A life span perspective*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Pianta, Robert. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. ED 435 073.

Rice, Mable L. (1993). "Don't talk to him: he's weird": A social consequences account of interactions. In Ann P. Kaiser & David B. Gray (Eds.), *Enhancing children's communication: Research foundations for intervention* (pp. 130-158). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Roberts, Michael C. (1996). *Model programs in child and family mental health*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Skinner, Christopher H.; Neddenriep, Christine E.; Robinson, Sheri L.; Ervin, Ruth; & Jones, Kevin. (2002). Altering educational environments through positive peer reporting: Prevention and remediation of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

social problems associated with behavior disorders. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(2), 191-202. EJ 642 606.

Stormont, Melissa. (2001). Preschool family and child characteristics associated with stable behavior problems in children. *Journal of Early Intervention, 24*(4), 241-251. EJ 650 506.

Stormont, Melissa. (2002). Externalizing behavior problems in young children: Contributing factors and early intervention. *Psychology in the Schools, 39*(2), 127-138. EJ 642 601.

Sugai, George, & Lewis, Timothy J. (1996). Preferred and promising practices for social skills instruction. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 29*(4), 1-16. EJ 545 946.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Language use, English ability, and linguistic isolation for the population 5 to 17 years by state: 2000* [Online]. Washington, DC: Author. Available: http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t20/tab02.pdf [2003, September 10].

Valdez-Menchaca, Marta C., & Whitehurst, G. J. (1992). Accelerating language development through picture book reading: A systematic extension to Mexican day care. *Developmental Psychology, 28*(6), 1106-1114. EJ 454 910.

Van Acker, Richard; Grant, Sharon H.; & Henry, David. (1996). Teacher and student behavior as a function of risk for aggression. *Education and Treatment of Children, 19*(3), 316-334. EJ 534 138.

Walker, Hill M. (1998). First steps to prevent antisocial behavior. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 30*(4), 16-19. EJ 562 666.

Walker, Hill M.; Colvin, Geoff; & Ramsey, Elizabeth. (1995). *Antisocial behavior in school: Strategies and best practices*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. ED 389 133.

Watkins, Ruth V. (1994). Specific language impairments in children: An introduction. In Ruth V. Watkins & Mabel L. Rice (Eds.), *Specific language impairments in children* (pp. 1-15). Baltimore, MD: Brookes. ED 368 192.

Webster-Stratton, Carolyn. (1997). Early intervention for families of preschool children with conduct problems. In Michael J. Guralnick (Ed.), *The effectiveness of early intervention* (pp. 429-453). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

West, Jerry; Denton, Kristin; & Germino-Hausken, Elvie. (2000). *America's kindergartners: Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, kindergarten class of 1998-99*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. ED 438 089.

Author Information

Melissa Stormont is currently an associate professor of special education at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She received her B.A. in psychology, M.A. in education, and Ph.D. in special education from Purdue University. During her time at Purdue, she was a student of Dr. Sydney Zentall, a leading expert in the area of AD/HD. Melissa developed an interest in early identification and intervention for young children with risk factors, including early AD/HD symptoms and family adversity. Much of her early work was in the area of contributing factors to the manifestation of aggression and more serious and stable behavior problems in young children. Recently her work has grown in scope to include school factors that also interact with children's risk for developing or maintaining behavior problems. Melissa's recent work has been in the area of young children who are vulnerable, including children in Head Start programs and children who are identified with serious behavior problems. Melissa has published extensively in the area of young children with behavior problems and currently serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Behavioral Education*.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Melissa Stormont
University of Missouri-Columbia
311K Townsend
Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education
Telephone: 573-882-7383
Fax: 573-884-0520
Email: Stormontm@missouri.edu

Linda M. Espinosa is currently an associate professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia and most recently the co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University. She has had experience as a preschool teacher, child care center director, elementary school principal, central office administrator, state program director, and corporate vice-president of education. Her practical experience and research interests focus on the design and evaluation of optimal learning environments for young children who are at risk for school failure. Dr. Espinosa is currently on the Board of Examiners for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and a Commissioner for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Standards and Criteria Commission. Her current research interests include professional development and teacher preparation systems and their relationship to effective early childhood teaching practices. Dr. Espinosa has worked extensively with low-income Hispanic/Latino children and families throughout the state of California. She developed and directed the Family Focus for School Success program in Redwood City, California, which has received state and national recognition. She has published many articles and training manuals on how to establish effective support services for low-income, minority families and second-language acquisition. She is the past treasurer of the NAEYC Governing Board and participated on the National Academy of Sciences Research Roundtable on Head Start. She has recently completed a 3-year study of the effectiveness of technology in supporting primary school reform and was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, National Research Board Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy project, and a contributing author to *Eager to Learn*. She completed her B.A. at the University of Washington, her Ed.M. at Harvard University, and her Ph.D. in educational psychology at the University of Chicago.

Nancy Knipping, Ph.D., is an associate professor of early childhood education at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She joined the faculty at MU in 1986 and currently teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in early childhood education and coordinates MU's undergraduate early childhood education program. Her current research interests and teaching responsibilities center around K-3 teaching practices and early childhood teacher education. Before moving to higher education, she taught preschool, kindergarten, and third grade in Illinois, Colorado, and Indiana. She earned her B.S.Ed. in elementary education with a kindergarten teaching endorsement, her M.Ed. in elementary guidance from MU, and her Ph.D. in early childhood education from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

Rebecca B. McCathren, Ph.D., is an early childhood special educator and an associate professor of special education at the University of Missouri-Columbia where she coordinates the master's program in early childhood special education. She received her B.A. in humanities from New College of California, an elementary teaching certification from San Francisco State University, an early childhood certification from Pacific Oaks College, and her M.A. from California State University, Los Angeles. During that time, she worked with young children who were typically developing as well as those with delays and disabilities in many settings, including a parent cooperative preschool, residential treatment centers, respite care programs, public school kindergarten, Head Start, and an integrated early childhood center. She left California to pursue her Ph.D. in special education at Vanderbilt. Since completing her Ph.D., she has been a faculty member in the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Her research interests include communication and language development, early intervention, and autism. She is a member of the *Journal of Behavioral Education* and *Young Exceptional Children* review boards.

| ECRP Home Page | Issue Intro Page | Table of Contents |

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Supporting Vulnerable Learners in the Primary Grades: Strategies to Prevent Early School Failure	
Author(s): Melissa Stormont, Linda Espinosa, Nancy Knipping, & Rebecca McCathren	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
[X]	[ ]	[ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please	Signature: [signature]	Printed Name/Position/Title: Melissa Stormont	
	Organization/Address: University of Missouri-Columbia 311K Townsend Columbia, MO	Telephone: 573-882-7383	FAX: 573-884-0520
		E-Mail Address: stormontm@missouri.edu	Date:

(over)

ED 431544
CE 078 316

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

Laurel Preece, Editor
ERIC/EECE
Children's Research Center
University of Illinois
51 Gerty Dr.
Champaign, IL 61820-7469

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
1100 West Street, 2nd Floor
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-953-0263
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)
PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE